

Simple Message; Simple Mission

Anytime a miracle comes up in our appointed lessons, you can be sure that there is always more than enough material for a sermon; probably even too much for one sitting. Today's account of the miraculous catch of fish is a prime example. We could spend a few hours simply meditating on how Jesus was telling these professional fishermen to do things that seemed absolutely foolish by all practical/worldly standards. Put out into *deep* water in the middle of the day and let down your nets? Guys: **That's not how you do it!** The type of fishing these guys engaged in with the nets was performed in *relatively shallow water*. This wasn't a deep-sea sort of venture. Their tackle and their equipment was made for close-to-shore fishing. If you wanted to catch fish as a first-century fisherman, you tried to cast your nets where the most fish would be, which is typically in *shallower, warmer water at night*, when the fish are most active. Think about that for a moment. Jesus (a land-loving son of a carpenter) was telling these professional fishermen A) how to do their job, and B) to do something **completely outside the norm; something that was guaranteed to fail!** "*Put out into the deep water in the middle of the day and cast your shallow-fishing nets out for a catch.*" That right there tells you something big is about to happen! There's a reason it's called "fishing" and not "catching." There are plenty of times you get skunked. Jesus doesn't say, "*Let's try our hand at some fishing.*" He tells them to let down their nets *for a catch*. And here's the thing: **They did it.** "*Because you say so, Lord.*" I think we often miss just how *profound* this response; this statement of faith really is, so profound, in fact, that Martin Luther called this a *greater miracle* than the miraculous catch of fish itself.

We could certainly also devote hours of study to the *missional symbolism* attached to this particular miracle. We could talk about "what does this mean," but in so doing we would also have to address "what does this NOT mean." Lord knows our Christian forefathers have produced *libraries* of books on this subject. For example, the image of the church—the image of God's people—has always been that of a boat or a ship, going all the way back to Noah, ***but it's especially made clear in this particular Gospel lesson.*** Jesus knows what's coming. He doesn't command that they get a bigger boat; a "mega-boat." Nope. The great catch spills over into more boats. This is how "church" is supposed to be.

What about the nets? I know its very popular nowadays to hear congregations putting on "net-fishing events" in their communities. They boast of casting their nets out into the community by having block parties and paintball tournaments and providing a great coffee bar and movie nights and every fun thing under the sun, all in an attempt to add more names to the roster. And people do come out for the free stuff. ***They get caught up in those nets.*** However, those are

man's nets that are being cast. ***That's how man says you need to be a successful fisherman of men.*** Those aren't the nets that Jesus was teaching about. That's not the catch Christ is looking for.

The nets in this lesson have **always** been understood to symbolize ***God's means of grace—His Word and His Sacraments.*** That's what Christ was teaching His future apostles. That's what Christ still teaches us today. *"I know it sounds crazy. I know that the rest of the world says different, but their way is not My way. I give you all you need to make disciples of all nations. **Listen to Me.** Use what I give you. Cast those simple nets of Law and Gospel; those simple nets of Word and Sacrament, out into all the world **when and where I command—even into those seemingly craziest, most unproductive spots, and let Me provide.**" "Because you say so, Lord." **That's the response of faith.** "Because you say so, Lord." It's so very simple.*

And that's where we need to focus the lion's share of our attention this morning—on the ***simplicity*** of all that our Lord sets before us in these texts. All too often we miss the overarching simplicity of all this because we get too focused on one or two specific tidbits; e.g., the symbolism, catching and not fishing, etc. ***Chief of sinners, right here!*** Consider all that our Lord reveals to us here in these texts regarding evangelism and mission and making disciples of all nations. As we've already stated a few moments ago, ***the simplicity of the mission begins with the simplicity of the message; the simplicity of God's means of grace.*** We don't need to re-invent the wheel. Simply cast the simple nets of His Word and Sacraments into the world, and let Him provide. His Word **never** returns to Him void or empty, right? His Word **always** accomplishes **exactly** what He purposes, **each and every time.** By worldly standards, we may get skunked sometimes. That doesn't mean that God's Word isn't succeeding in its heaven-sent mission.

Just consider what God Himself tells Isaiah right out of the gate. He calls Isaiah to go and proclaim the full counsel of God—full Law and full Gospel. *"Here I am! Send me!"* Great! But just so you're aware; just so you understand: Preach ***My Word.*** **Don't change a thing.** Don't try to help Me out. Don't try to appease the people. Preach My Word, and be prepared. Their ears will go deaf. Their eyes will go blind. They will close off out of anger. Their eyes and ears of faith will get heavy with tiredness and boredom. Their heart will become calloused and dull. They won't listen. They won't pay attention. They won't care. They will reject you and Me. Keep preaching! Don't change a thing! *"How long, O Lord?"* Don't you worry about it! You keep doing the job I've given you to do. ***Pretty simple, isn't it? It's not easy to hear, but it's simple to understand.*** Cast the nets. Some will hear and repent. Many will not. You do what you're given to do. *"Because you say so, Lord."* It's easy to say, but it's not so easy to

actually live out when things aren't shaking out in your favor or producing the "successful results" we desire.

Consider, also, *the simplicity of the message*. St. Paul hits on this very plainly in his epistle. *"I would rather speak five simple words with my mind in order to instruct others than ten thousand words in a strange tongue that nobody else understands; words that may make me feel special, but don't do my neighbor any good in building them up in the faith."* Centuries upon centuries of our church fathers have theorized that the five simple words Paul is referring to are *the five words that make up the acrostic for the Greek word "fish."* If you remember, being a Christian at this particular time in the Roman empire was hazardous to one's health. **Christians didn't stop meeting though!** They simply took their worship underground. They used the simple symbol of the fish to make other Christians aware of their presence and the presence of their worshipping community. Ιχθυς (fish) – "Ιησου Χριστού θεού υιος σοτερ - (I)Jesus (χ)Christ, (θ)God's (υ)Son, (ς)Savior." Think on that. *Paul is making crystal-clear what the mission and the message is all about—Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior. Five simple words.* Being a faithful fisher/catcher of men is all about casting out the nets of Christ—His Word and His sacraments. That's it. No big screens and entertaining concerts and coffee bars or *the ten-thousand other things* that Christians with big hearts and good intentions tend to focus on in an attempt to help God out and be "more successful." Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior. Where the Word is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered. It's pretty simple, when you get down to it.

Enough on all this. You get it. It's simple. Turn your attention here [*the cross; the altar; the font*]. Here is where all true mission and evangelism flows from out into the world, and here is where all true mission and evangelism leads to—the altar, the pulpit, the font. It's circular in nature, flowing forth from Christ, and flowing back to Christ. *"Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior." It's so simple.* And let me remind you: *You are God's greatest catch.* Here's the proof. If that doesn't inspire Isaiah-like joy and zeal, then you simply don't understand or don't care. *"Here I am! Send me!"* Here's what He cast away for you. He loved you so much that He willingly ransomed His own Son's life for yours. Your sins are so great that Almighty God Himself had to die for them! *I pray you never grow tired or weary of hearing this hard, but beautiful Truth.* God died for your sins. God died so that you can have eternal life. Jesus rose again from the dead in order to prove to you and to all the world that His sacrifice on the cross was truly and completely "all-atoning." It is finished, in Christ and because of Christ. It's that simple.

Folks: It is this simple net of the full counsel of God—full Law and full Gospel—that He used to bring you into the *life and salvation of His ark—the*

Church, and it's the same Gospel net [Word and Sacraments] that He *continues* to use to strengthen you and keep you in His ark of salvation with all your fellow believers. And it is this same holy net of Gospel that He *arms and equips* you with in your *daily vocations as baptized children of God and faithful fishers of men*. *“In your going, be making disciples of all nations.” In your going, be letting down those nets for a catch. “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men. Do not be afraid, for I am with you always, even to the very end of the age. Let go, let down My nets, and let Me work.”*

Because You say so, Lord. AMEN